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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000386

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, H, AND NEA/MAG

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SUBJECT: MOROCCO: VIRGINIA GOVERNOR KAINE'S VISIT A SUCCESS

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Classified By: CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Virginia Governor Tim Kaine had a highly successful visit to Morocco on April 23, 24 and 25 that helped energize overall bilateral relations as well as achieve economic and trade development goals of his state. Kaine, who is also Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, met with Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi, Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa, Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri, and Chairman of Morocco's Human Right Commission (CCDH) Ahmed Herzenni. The governor also met with Commerce and New Technologies Ahmed Chami, who urged the administration to work toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. The main focus of the trip was promoting economic ties. Despite Governor Kaine's protestations that he did not represent the U.S. Government, the Moroccans gave him a royal welcome, in an effort to convey a positive messages to the Obama Administration, including on their top priority, recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara. End Summary.

Purpose of the Visit: Virginia,s
Search for Economic Partners

¶2. (C) On April 23, 24 and 25, in his first official visit to Morocco, hosted by the Government of Morocco (GOM) by invitation from King Mohammed VI, Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, had a series of political and economic discussions with the highest levels of the Moroccan Government, save the King. Accompanied by Charge, PolCouns or D/PolCouns, Virginia Director of Communication for Economic Affairs Rick Richardson, Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Patrick Gottschalk, and Virginia Port Authority representative Russ Held, Governor Kaine told his interlocutors that his primary goal in coming to Morocco was to deepen economic ties between Virginia and Morocco and to celebrate long-standing positive ties between the U.S. and Morocco.

¶3. (C) In addition to engaging Governor Kaine on a full spectrum of possible cooperative economic projects, there were clear political overtones to his meetings. No doubt owing to his status as National Democratic Party Chairman, Moroccan officials accorded Governor Kaine high protocol. Apart from exploring "win-win" economic opportunities (See septel), Moroccan officials used the opportunity to showcase Morocco as a progressive, moderate and dynamic country and to convey messages to the Obama Administration.

Prime Minister: "Morocco is Becoming More Democratic"

14. (C) In the opening meeting on April 23, Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi underscored the progress on political reforms Morocco had made by contrasting disputed election results in most elections since 1963, against the last legislative elections held September 2007, which he called internationally recognized as transparent and fair.

Interior: "Morocco is Secure But Faces Challenges"

15. (C) Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa set the electoral scene and provided Governor Kaine with the security backdrop of Morocco. Benmoussa underscored the importance of the upcoming local government elections in June. In addition to highlighting recent reforms, to include reserving at least 12 percent of seats for women (up from 0.5 percent), Benmoussa said that his Ministry was working to improve democracy at the local level and improve its ability to provide services, including security, to citizens.

16. (C) At the regional level, Benmoussa said Morocco was determined to combat social ills such as human and drug trafficking and terrorism. He highlighted the threats the country faced, especially from the Sahel. Benmoussa said given the area's lawlessness, nomadic populations, and remoteness, only international cooperation coupled with intelligence sharing and knowledge of local tribes could overcome these problems.

17. (C) Benmoussa asserted that in the religious and societal sphere, King Mohammed VI was dedicated to maintaining a modern and moderate form of Islam in Morocco. "He is determined to preserve democracy, human rights, and certain forms of the Moroccan identity," Benmoussa explained. "At

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the same time, as Commander of the Faithful, the King oversees all faiths in Morocco: Muslim, Jewish, and Christian. There are many contradictions in this country that need to be managed; we must strike a balance to move forward, while maintaining stability," he said.

18. (C) Speaking on Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara, Benmoussa said that the plan called for reforms while preserving national unity. He speculated that other countries in the region may see the plan, a unique model for regional autonomy, as a threat.

Foreign Minister: "Frustrated with Algeria"

19. (C) Moroccan Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri praised the long standing bilateral ties between the U.S. and Morocco. Under Hassan II, the two countries established strong ties in the military and intelligence spheres and now King Mohammed VI hoped to expand this into the economic realm. The U.S. was a key partner, and Virginia a model of economic cooperation with Morocco for other U.S. states. In light of the success of the Free trade Agreement (FTA) with the U.S., Fassi Fihri proposed that the FTA be used as a means of encouraging joint production within the Arab Maghreb Union in the hopes of increasing trade and improving relations with Algeria (septel).

110. (C) Fassi Fihri described Moroccan relations with Algeria as difficult, complicated by the Western Sahara issue and Algeria's "Castro-like mind set." Fassi Fihri expressed frustration at the lack of "new blood" in Algeria's leadership ranks, saying that the lack of change in leadership was contributing the perpetuation of the status quo, adding that Western Sahara complicated cooperation in other spheres like countering terrorism, drugs and human smuggling. On the Middle East, Fihri said that the time had come for Israel to be allowed to live in peace with its Arab

neighbors, including a Palestine state.

Human Rights Commission: "Painful Chapter Closing"

¶11. (C) Chairman of Morocco's Advisory Council for Human Rights (CCDH) Ahmed Herzenni said the CCDH, created in 1990, has served under King Mohammed VI to liberate political prisoners, compensate victims, and provide accountability to families of victims of the "disappearances" during the "years of lead" of King Hassan II. The Commission has compensated financially or supplied free medical care to over 23,000 families affected by repression during the "years of lead."

¶12. (C) Twenty percent of the 23,000 were cases in the Western Sahara, statistically the worst affected region of government repression. CCDH's office in Laayoune is implementing an action plan for civil rights and democratic development. Herzenni, a former political prisoner himself, said that while individual cases will probably always exist, there is no longer a systemic problem of human rights abuse at the hands of the Moroccan Government. Herzenni added, however, that judicial reform is needed but an action plan is in the work.

¶13. (C) Governor Kaine applauded the reform work of CCDH, alluding to his own work as a civil rights lawyer working against discrimination in minority housing. Governor Kaine encouraged Herzenni to reach out to the Institute of Judicial Independence founded by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Message to President Obama: "Make
the U.S. An Honest Broker Again"

¶14. (C) On April 23, during a discussion of cooperative economic opportunities (septel), Minister of Industry, Commerce and New Technologies Ahmed Chami, aware of the governor's second role as Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, urged Governor Kaine to convey a message to President Obama. "Morocco and the rest of the world were waiting with hope for the United States to take up its indispensable role in the peace negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. We believe that under President Obama, the U.S. has the opportunity to return the U.S. to its place as honest broker, after many years of

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obscurity. This conflict has gone on too long; if it can be resolved, terrorism groups that plague the region will also lose a huge source of anger that sustains their ranks," he predicted.

Comment

¶15. (C) The Moroccans seized on Governor Kaine's visit to Morocco as a chance to promote ties with both Virginia and the rest of the U.S. In addition to economic relations, they looked to open a channel to the new administration, while also sensitizing to Moroccan perspectives (especially on Western Sahara), someone they consider to be a prospective political "heavy weight." Governor Kaine and his party heard the same refrains we have been hearing over the last several months: Morocco is more concerned about terrorism in the Sahel; narcotics trafficking through West Africa and Morocco is becoming a threat to regional stability; Middle East peace must be a priority; and the FTA and the Millennium Challenge Account Compact provide the basis for greater economic cooperation. End Comment.

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